

BOROUGH OF OKEHAMPTON


ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

FOR

Year ending 31st December, 1948



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MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

FOR

YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1948

PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF:

Medical Officer of Health:

E. D. ALLEN-PRICE, M.D., D.P.H.

Borough Engineer and Sanitary Inspector:

R. A. BRUNSKILL, D.P., R.S.I.

Assistant to Sanitary Inspector:

E. FURSE

Hon. Meteorologist:

ALDERMAN HARRY

MR. MAYOR, ALDERMEN AND COUNCILLORS,

I beg to submit my Annual Report for the year ended 31st December, 1948.

The general health of the Borough remained good throughout the year and apart from Chicken Pox the exanthemata were minimal.

The birth rate of 16.9 per thousand population compares very favourably with that of 17.9 for England and Wales as a whole.

The death rate at 15.4 does not compare favourably in its uncorrected state with that of England and Wales at 10.8 but this is probably not significant as no comparability factor is supplied nowadays by the Registrar General.

Chief Industries.

These remain as in previous years but there has been a steady increase in the light industrial activity in the North Road area. This is considered a very desirable progress.

SECTION A.

General Statistics

Area (statute acres)	..	..	..	..	806
Population—1931 Census	..	..	..	..	3,307
Estimated Population—Mid 1948	..	..	..	..	4,090
Number of Inhabited Houses	..	..	..	..	1,090
Rateable Value	..	..	..	..	£24,371
Product of Penny Rate	..	..	..	..	£96
Loan Debt	..	..	..	..	£47,366

Vital Statistics

			<i>Male.</i>	<i>Female.</i>	<i>Total.</i>
Live Births	..	..	37	32	69
Legitimate	..	..	34	30	
Illegitimate	..	..	3	2	
					<i>England and Wales.</i>
Birth Rate per 1,000 population	..	..	16.9		17.9
Still Births	..	..	..	2	
Still Birth Rate	..	..	..	28	0.42
			<i>Male.</i>	<i>Female.</i>	<i>Total.</i>
Deaths	..	..	32	31	63
Death Rate per 1,000 population	..	..	15.4		10.8
Deaths from Maternal Causes	..	..	Nil		1.02
Deaths of Infants under 1 year	..	..	3		
Infantile Mortality	..	..	..	43	34

The 63 deaths of the townsfolk were made up as follows :—

INFECTIOUS CAUSES :

Pulmonary Tuberculosis	1
------------------------	----	----	----	----	---

GENERAL CAUSES :

Heart Disease	..	..	..	..	12
Cerebral Haemorrhage	..	..	..	..	8
Coronary Thrombosis	..	..	..	..	8
Cancer	..	..	..	..	8
Bronchitis	..	..	..	..	4
Pneumonia	..	..	..	..	3
Nephritis	..	..	..	..	2
Diabetes	..	..	..	..	1
Goitre	..	..	..	..	1
Senility	..	..	..	..	1
Pernicious Anaemia	..	..	..	..	1
Suicide	..	..	..	..	1
Other Violent Causes	..	..	..	..	4
All Other Causes	..	..	..	..	5

INFANTS UNDER 1 YEAR :

Congenital	..	..	..	..	..	..	1
Asphyxia	..	..	..	..	..	..	2
							<hr/>
Total						..	63
							<hr/>

Age of Death Table

<i>Age at Death.</i>						<i>Males.</i>	<i>Females.</i>
Infants under 1 year	..	..	..	..	..	2	1
1- 5	..	..	..	..	..	1	—
5-15	..	..	..	..	..	—	—
15-25	..	..	..	..	..	1	—
25-35	..	..	..	..	..	—	—
35-45	..	..	..	..	..	—	1
45-55	..	..	..	..	..	3	2
55-65	..	..	..	..	..	5	4
65-75	..	..	..	..	..	11	9
75 and over	..	..	..	..	..	9	14
						<hr/>	<hr/>
						32	31
						<hr/>	<hr/>
Total						..	63

SECTION B.

GENERAL PROVISIONS OF THE HEALTH SERVICES

Up to the appointed day for the implementation of the National Health Service Act, the general provisions of the health services remained as in previous years and were, apart from lack of maternity accommodation, reasonably adequate. After 5th July, 1948, the Hospital and Public Assistance Institution became vested in the South West Regional Hospital Board and are managed by the Exeter and Mid Devon Hospital Management Committee.

The immunisation services, which had been very well received by the public, ceased to be a responsibility of your Council and were centralised in Exeter.

Maternity Accommodation. This is provided for at the War Memorial Hospital and after the appointed day became the responsibility of the Regional Hospital Board although up to the time of writing the County Council are acting as agents for the Board for the admission of patients. It is still considered that adequate maternity accommodation is urgently required for the Borough and immediate surrounding district.

SECTION C.

SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE AREA

Water Supply.

The Borough Engineer has submitted the following report on the water supply :—

Sources. The whole sources of supply are from watersheds in the interland of Dartmoor feeding two intakes, one at Newbridge on the Black-a-Ven stream, and the older and smaller at Yes Tor on the Red-a-Ven stream. Both are within the area of the Dartmoor National Park and within the military training and artillery ranges. These latter largely preclude both the access of the public and minimise stock grazing on the water sheds. Supplies at the intakes have been quite adequate throughout the year.

Rainfall. Rainfall records are taken at two points on the water shed, and at the filter station at Brackentor. During 1946 the rainfall was extraordinarily high as will be seen from the following comparative figures for the past nine years. For 1948 the readings were substantially higher than in 1947 and the second highest since records have been taken. Monthly readings have been taken at Cranmere and Newbridge. Records at the Filter Station are taken daily.

	1948	1947	1946	1945	1944	1943	1942	1941	1940
Cranmere ...	92.80	78.05	109.4	76.70	86.6	83.95	77.8	65.9	75.6
Newbridge ...	76.66	59.95	86.15	61.60	63.45	65.60	64.15	56.15	63.2
Filter Station ...	56.55	49.20	67.99	52.32	5.142	57.92	48.47	47.42	53.22
Dry Days (no rain) ...	158	188	105	180	178	142	174	177	—

The driest months were June, July and September, and the wettest December and January in that order. There were no long dry spells with the exception of January 15th to February 14th which was broken only by snowstorms and .31" rain on January 27th. Falls of over 1" in one day were recorded in January and December when 2.22" fell on the 2nd. Of the total 56.55", 22.53" fell in the two months January and December. These figures all refer to the Filter Station.

Intake Mains. Though within the artillery danger areas the intake mains have again escaped damage and have functioned properly throughout the year despite frequent artillery fire. During the year the roof of the old sand filter station, now disused, was dismantled. Further work in clearing supply pipes and land draining

has been carried out on the abandoned works on the Okehampton Western Park Estate, and this work was generally completed at the end of the year. This work has involved the use of badly needed manpower on work of no productive value to the undertaking.

Filtration and Treatment. The plant has been in continuous operation throughout the year. Minor intermittent faults were remedied by the attendant in daily attendance. For the first time since installation in 1939, the pressure filters were completely overhauled. This work involved the removal of all sand, and the dismantling, removal and replacement of hundreds of nozzles. The filters were in generally good condition when opened up. Filters are generally washed daily by high pressure air scour and kept up to a high operational standard which is essential owing to the intake of peaty solids. The treated water is clear, colourless and of excellent taste. It is particularly pleasant for both personal washing and domestic washing. Analyses indicate it to be of a satisfactory standard of purity both bacteriologically and chemically. The purity of the water is such that it is regularly used for topping up batteries in place of the distilled water usually necessary. Three additional men are trained and available for filter operation.

Distribution. The zoned distribution system giving a standardised pressure in the central low-level area and maintaining pressure in the outer high level zones continues to operate with the minimum of trouble. Overhaul of the controlling pressure reducing valve was necessary for the first time since 1942. Extensions carried out include new mains on the second portion of the Far View Permanent Housing Estate, for which asbestos cement pressure pipes have been used. Additional supplies in large quantities were supplied throughout the year again for the large service camp.

Mains were regularly flushed and leak inspections continuously carried out. Leaks were found and repaired on 26 corporation service pipes, 3 corporation mains, and on 55 consumers services. Considerable maintenance work in clearing service pipes, mainly by force pump, was carried out, no fewer than 53 services being treated in this way. The employment of a plumber as filter attendant for the past seven years continues a most satisfactory arrangement for maintaining and servicing the undertaking. When main supplies are cut off for prolonged periods for repairs warnings are given by loud speaker van or house to house calls. This is often much more costly than the actual repair works. It should be noted that though the area of supply and number of services progressively increase each year, the total repairs and consequent cost progressively decreases. This is largely due to the standardised water pressure maintaining reduced wear and tear on service pipes. New services and supply pipes are now largely being laid in copper tube in place of lead.

Drainage and Sewerage.

Sewers and sewage disposal works have continued to operate satisfactorily with no serious defects. Trade effluent from the Gas Works has continued with little nuisance. In Mill Road a further length of defective flushing sewer was entirely relaid with new pipes and this work has been completed. Minor repairs were carried out on the West River Sewer.

The enlarged sludge beds have been in operation throughout the year and have been most satisfactory. The irrigation channels were partially cleared. Effluent standards have been well maintained and no complaints as to river pollution have been received.

Public Cleansing—Refuse Collection and Disposal.

These have been carried out directly by the Corporation, and weekly collections have again been maintained without interruption throughout the year.

The Corporation use a 2-3 ton Commer Tipping motor waggon. This is provided with a quick fitting dual purpose body cover which I designed for sanitary refuse collection and general transport work. A crew of a driver and two men collect the refuse satisfactorily on Thursdays and Fridays each week with an additional trade collection on Tuesdays. Street cleansing is also carried out over some areas at the same time as refuse collection. The collection and disposal of refuse in this manner is proving considerably more satisfactory than the former arrangements during the nearly three years it has been in operation up to the end of 1948. With the improvement of available supplies further steps to replace defective bins have been taken. Manual street cleansing is by orderly truck.

The disposal of refuse is by regulated tipping on the Council's refuse tip, where rodent control is carried out by the Council's own operator. In addition the tip is regularly treated and sprayed with tip dressing for the control of flies. This is done daily or two or three times a week when necessary and has been found most effective. Considerable quantities of trade refuse are also dumped on the tip. Levelling of the tip to improve its shape is continuously carried out.

Sanitary Inspection of the Area.

Mr. Brunskill, the Sanitary Inspector, has supplied me with the following Sanitary Inspection of the area during the year :—

SANITARY INSPECTIONS.

Visits as follows :—

Houses	..	..	..	..	..	77
Houses <i>re</i> Housing			..	..	..	84
Drainage	..	..	..	..	..	42

Water Closets	..	..	..	..	19
Sewerage	..	..	..	..	12
Water Supply	..	..	..	..	83
Rivers	..	..	..	..	12
Refuse Removal	..	..	..	..	34
Salvage	..	..	..	..	43
Refuse Disposal Tip	..	..	..	..	20
Tents and Vans	..	..	..	..	2
Schools	..	..	..	..	28
Infectious Diseases	..	..	..	..	—
Infestation	..	..	..	..	1
Rodents	..	..	..	..	30
Animals	..	..	..	..	8
Miscellaneous	..	..	..	..	23
Informal Notices	..	..	..	..	27
Remedied	..	..	..	..	22

Infectious Diseases and Disinfection.

Premises have been disinfected and fumigated as follows :— one house after death, hospital wards after chicken pox and one death. No other cases of infectious diseases had to be dealt with as was the case last year. No disinfestation treatment has been necessary.

Rodent Control.

In accordance with Ministry of Food requirements rodent control has been in operation throughout the year with the same part-time operator appointed and trained last year. Block control has been carried out throughout the area, and at the refuse tip and sewerage disposal works. In addition the whole of the sewers were tested for infestation, and the minimum of infestation was discovered. The incidence of infestation in the area continues to decline and control is effectively keeping it down to these desirable limits.

Rivers and Streams.

The East and West Ockment rivers have generally remained self-cleansing and very clean. Minor intermittent pollutions from the Gas Works and Laundries have been remedied at short notice.

Swimming Pools.

The swimming pool and paddling pool, both of which are supplied by continuous running water, have been well maintained and conducted. In addition the pools are emptied and cleansed periodically during the season.

Smoke Abatement.

Three minor cases of smoke emersion were dealt with by informal action, and two informal notices issued.

Fish Frying.

There are two small fish frying shops which have been well conducted, and no action has been necessary.

Bakehouses, Meat and Food Shops.

These premises have been well maintained and most tradesmen take a pride in the cleanliness of their premises. Inspections were made but no action was necessary.

Offensive Trades.

At the two establishments seven inspections were made.

Cowsheds, Dairies and Milkshops.

Twenty-eight inspections of cowsheds, dairies and milkshops were made and two informal notices were given. Generally the standard of cleanliness was good and in some cases very good.

Factories and Workshops.

These have been kept in good condition. Inspections have been made in 22 instances but no formal action was necessary.

1. INSPECTIONS.

<i>Premises</i> (1)	<i>Number on Register</i> (2)	<i>Number of</i>		
		<i>Inspections</i> (3)	<i>Written Notices</i> (4)	<i>Occupiers Prosecuted</i> (5)
(i) Factories in which Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 are to be enforced by Local Authorities	26	14	Nil	Nil
(ii) Factories not included in (i) in which Section 7 is enforced by the Local Authority	10	8	Nil	Nil
(iii) Other Premises	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	36	22	Nil	Nil

2. CASES IN WHICH DEFECTS WERE FOUND.

Particulars	Number of cases in which defects were found				Number of cases in which prosecutions were instituted (6)
	Found	Remedied	To H.M. Inspector	By H.M. Inspector	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
Want of Cleanliness	2	2	—	—	—
Overcrowding ...	—	—	—	—	—
Unreasonable Temperature...	—	—	—	—	—
Inadequate Ventilation ...	—	—	—	—	—
Ineffective drainage of floors ...	—	—	—	—	—
Sanitary Conveniences :					
(a) Insufficient	—	—	—	—	—
(b) Unsuitable or defective	2	2	—	—	—
(c) Not separate for sexes ...	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL ...	4	4	—	—	—

SECTION D.

HOUSING

During the year further substantial maintenance repairs and painting works have been carried out on the pre-war houses in Macey's Terrace and Brayhams Estates.

Further minor works were carried out in the fourteen additional family units provided by the requisitioning and conversion of properties.

On the Lower Brayhams and Brickfield Temporary Housing Estates the fifteen aluminium houses were finally completed by the installation of electric refrigerators and erection of fences.

Site works on the Lower Brayhams and Brickfield Temporary Housing Sites were completed by the tarmac surfacing of the service road and subsequent surface dressing. In accordance with Council policy additional allotments adjoining the houses were laid out for the tenants requiring them.

On the Far View Permanent Housing Estate site works were continued as materials and labour became available. Sewers and the construction of concrete roads and water mains were generally completed.

The erection of eight non-traditional permanent houses of the Cornish Unit type was commenced in 1947 but was held up. At the beginning of the year the roofs of two houses were completed and roof timbers for six houses, and the houses were completed, equipped and ready for occupation in May. Throughout the course of erection of these houses there was a serious shortage of labour and nearly all the building force were transported over sixty miles each day to and from the site.

Following these, six traditional brick houses in pairs were commenced and were in progress at the end of the year.

SECTION E.

INSPECTION AND SUPERVISION OF FOOD

Milk.

From the 18 producers who supply milk, either by wholesale to retailers or retailing it themselves, only two of them are Accredited and one Tuberculin Tested. 78 samples of milk were taken during the year and of these 48 (62%) passed the cleanliness test and 30 (38%) failed this test. This is a distinct improvement on the previous year but there is no doubt that there is a long way to go before the milk supply can be looked upon as an entirely satisfactory and safe article of food.

Action taken under Food and Drugs Act by the County Inspector.

Ten samples were taken in the Borough under the Food and Drugs Act. Seven were of milk and all of these were genuine. Average butterfat content was 3.76%, and average non-fatty solid content 8.84%.

Of three samples taken of other foods all were genuine.

Food Premises.

As the result of an observation by the M.O.H. it was considered necessary to bring to the notice of all people engaged in food preparation the provisions of Section 13 of the Food and Drugs Act, 1938. It was found that 29 premises had a catering licence and all were served with the contents of this section dealing with cleanliness, etc., and instructed to display same in a prominent place on the premises. Following this, inspections were made of

all premises where food is prepared or stored. The standard of cleanliness has been well maintained and in some cases particular pride appears to be taken in maintaining a high standard of hygiene. The tendency towards lighter and brighter colours such as cream and white in the decoration of shops and premises handling foods is to be highly commended. Dirt cannot go undetected for long against these backgrounds.

Meat.

The Tavistock Urban District Council have authorised the inclusion of the subjoined table of meat inspection at their Abattoir from whence you derive your meat.

	<i>Cattle excluding Cows</i>	<i>Cows</i>	<i>Calves</i>	<i>Sheep or Lambs</i>	<i>Pigs</i>
Number killed ...	1589	843	1341	6679	154
Number inspected	1589	843	1341	6679	154
<i>All diseases except Tuberculosis.</i>					
Whole carcases condemned	3	24	27	105	1
Carcases of which some part or organ was condemned	1294	677	15	1692	28
Percentage of the number inspected affected with disease other than Tuberculosis ...	81.62%	83.15%	3.13%	26.90%	18.83%
<i>Tuberculosis only.</i>					
Whole carcases condemned	13	30	4	—	2
Carcases of which some part or organ was condemned	110	165	—	—	8
Percentage of the number inspected affected with Tuberculosis	7.74%	23.13%	0.29%	—	6.49%

In addition to the meat condemned at the Slaughterhouse, 700½ lbs. of corned beef and mutton were condemned at the W.M.S.A. Depot in the Pannier Market.

Food Poisoning.

No case of food poisoning was notified during the year although the medical practitioners were reminded that this was an obligation. One can therefore assume that no disease was due to this cause.

Other Foodstuffs.

Various foods have been examined and twenty-nine condemnation certificates have been issued covering in nearly all cases canned foods which had deteriorated owing to defective containers. This is a substantial reduction on 1947.

SECTION F.

PREVALENCE OF AND CONTROL OVER INFECTIOUS DISEASE

The following cases of infectious diseases were notified by practitioners :—

Whooping Cough	..	..	..	..	4
Measles	..	..	..	..	3
Scarlet Fever	..	..	..	..	3
Pneumonia	..	..	..	..	1

The following cases of infectious diseases were notified by the schools :—

Chicken Pox	..	..	..	..	107
Scarlet Fever	..	..	..	..	3
German Measles	..	..	..	..	2
Scabies	..	..	..	..	2
Measles	..	..	..	..	1
Whooping Cough	..	..	..	..	1

Although it is possible for the people to be visited by more than a score of infectious conditions, it is the good fortune of the Borough that this does not occur in practice. It will be seen from the above tables that infectious diseases were at a minimum during the year 1948 apart from Chicken Pox, and there are only two to which I would draw your especial attention—diphtheria and tuberculosis.

Diphtheria. On the appointed day, 5th July, 1948, your Council ceased to be the responsible authority for the control of this serious disease, and it is considered not inappropriate to here record the past efforts at a local level to control this infection.

Up to about the year 1936 diphtheria had been an ever-present menace to this neighbourhood, as it was to the rest of the country. On the advice of your M.O.H. your Council voted the necessary money to carry out immunisation, which at that date was very little past the experimental stage. The almost immediate result of this campaign, which was restricted in the first instance to school children, was a drop in the incidence of the disease. The campaign was continued uninterruptedly except for a period during the war, and was entirely satisfactory in reducing the incidence to almost a curiosity.

During this time an elaborate system of filing and checking was evolved and the only people who were not treated were those who had an objection to the procedure. As will be seen from the accompanying table this did not amount to a significant percentage. Before the appointed day your M.O.H. made an offer to the new Health Authority to continue this service and supply any statistics required at any time. The offer was refused in spite of the fact that it was pointed out that the provisions of Section 26 of the Health Act had been in operation for years before the passage of legislation.

It is, I feel, fitting that your Council should be congratulated for having the forethought to sponsor this scheme in the past when it had no official recognition, and to hope that should the present arrangement fail, that you will be prepared, in the future, to re-establish this necessary procedure.

Percentage of Children who had completed full course of Diphtheria Immunisation to 5th July, 1948.

<i>Age</i>				<i>Estimated Population.</i>	<i>% Immunised.</i>
Under 5 years	..	..	..	297	62%
5-14 years	..	..	..	575	85%

Tuberculosis. One case of Non-Pulmonary Tuberculosis was notified during the year and one death was recorded from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. At the end of the year 22 cases remained on the register and it must be kept in mind that most of these are capable of and do pass the disease on to others. Tuberculosis is far and away the worst infectious disease we have to deal with and it is with us year in and year out, so much so that it is almost looked upon as an act of providence rather than an infectious condition.

The present arrangements for the control of this condition will not bear logical scrutiny and are in many cases tragic. The Hospital Board are responsible for those needing hospitalisation, as most do, but there are not enough vacancies ; in the meantime they infect their relations or workmates. The tuberculosis specialists visit the patients at home and follow-up visits are made by the County Council Health Visitor, and the general practitioner is responsible for the domiciliary treatment. None of these authorities or persons are in touch with the Sanitary Authority, or Medical Officer of Health, which is the only authority having the necessary means of allocating houses. It would appear that the prevention of this disease calls for a co-ordinated effort by all concerned and that the obvious officer to integrate all the recourses available is the local M.O.H. who should be in possession of all facts available affecting each case.

In conclusion, I would thank the Mayor and Corporation for the ready hearing my proposals always receive.

I am, Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

E. D. ALLEN-PRICE,
Medical Officer of Health.

